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NEWS RELEASE

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CLEARWATER COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$8.9 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Last year, Clearwater County residents and businesses received \$8.9 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 8,400 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Clearwater County ranks number 8 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$1,055 for every man, woman and child residing in Clearwater County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department distributed \$1.15 billion in Idaho communities in 2004. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Clearwater County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at the local hospital, and dozens of other badly needed services."

"This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing," adds Kurtz. "By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn't just me pounding my chest. That's what community leaders tell us."

Clearwater County Commission Chairman Don Ebert says, “Department money is very important. It gives people a way to survive. My favorite program is WIC (Women, Infant, and Children). It’s for innocent people who need help. Food Stamps are a good thing too. The state should spend money this way instead of competing. There are a lot of unemployed people here because the economy is in the tank. It’s a tough situation. We’re struggling desperately to create jobs.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$7.6 million on health care for residents of the county — \$1.4 million more than in 2003. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Glenwood Pharmacy in Orofino. “We have a high number of Medicaid clients. It’s about 17 percent of our business,” says pharmacy owner Don Goetsch. “We draw from Clearwater County and we draw from Idaho and Lewis counties, too. The state hospital is nearby and we get a lot of that clientele. The money stays in the community, so we consider it an investment. If you spend it here, more of it stays here.”

The story is much the same at Clearwater Valley Hospital. “The money we get from Medicaid is very valuable,” says Hospital Administrator Larry Kidd. The Disproportionate Share funds give us enough to replace old equipment. We’re still struggling a bit at Clearwater, but this is big money for a small facility like us.” Disproportionate Share money is an extra payment made to some hospitals which have a larger than average share of Medicaid patients. Disproportionate Share (DSH) funds are in addition to regular Medicaid payments for care at the hospital. The hospital received almost \$60,000 in DSH payments last year. All Medicaid payments to the hospital (excluding State Hospital North) in Clearwater County totaled more than \$650,000.

The county also benefits from State Hospital North, a Department-run facility for people with mental illness. Much of the hospital’s annual budget of \$5.8 million stays in the county to pay salaries of local staff and purchase services needed to keep the hospital running.

Clearwater County residents received \$598,000 in Food Stamps — \$50,000 more than in 2003. Food Stamp clients spent \$400,000 with local grocers to help feed their families. Barney’s Excell 4 in Orofino redeemed \$179,500. Manager Emmett Bartman says those dollars are “very important” to the business, representing between two and five percent of annual income.

They have 32 full- and part-time employees. “It helps to sustain our workforce,” Bartman says. “If I didn’t have this extra money, I would have to lay somebody off. It wouldn’t change our product line, but it would change our inventory.”

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz says, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. The dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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(Editors: Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director Dave Reynolds at 799-4338 for more information.)

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investment in every Idaho County
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<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**